

Otsuka Forge Custom Japanese Knife Care

Otsuka Hamaonokaji's knives feature unparalleled craftsmanship.

Details

- These are folded with two types of steel, iron and blue steel Aogami #1. Blue steel is at the core and you can see it where the wavy bottom edge begins. The benefit to the blue steel is the hardness and sharpness, edge retention and durability.
- These knives do patina over time—it goes from red (younger patina) to black. To remove some of the youngest patina if desired, you can use a lemon. To prevent rust, dry after each use and cleaning with paper. You may opt to keep them on a knife rack or keep wrapped (in a sheath or your own alternative).
- While chips are rare, they can occur. To prevent chips, ensure knives don't hit against the sink, other dishes, drying rack or each other. Chop on soft surface (e.g. soft plastic, rubber wood, cedar or cypress). Don't use cross pressure (e.g. not perpendicular) when cutting, and don't scrape the knife against a cutting board to push the food (turn the knife and use the top stainless steel edge to do this).
- To sharpen, use a whetstone. If you are local, the maker recommends Walton's Saw Works in San Rafael
- The handle is either Japanese Walnut or Cherry; the cherry trees grow on Otsuka San's property

Background

Aogami #1 is used for knives because the steel delivers a very hard, high performance. It also has higher carbon. What separates Otsuka San's knives from other Japanese knives you often see on the US market is that he still uses a traditional coke forge, with designs and temperature control techniques that have been unchanged for centuries. This allows the steel to maintain its precious carbon while it is being heated, unlike gas forges that strip carbon from steel. Because of the carbon, it will take on a patina through use as it oxidizes but this does not affect performance, it only gives it a unique character all its own.

While Sakai City near Osaka is well known for having a high concentration of skilled bladesmiths, Tottori is located in the region in Western Japan, formerly known as Inaba, famous for the iron rich sand which is used to make high quality Japanese blade steels. The few remaining bladesmiths in this sparsely populated region are deep with their craft. Tottori in particular has a strong history of the mingei (craft) movement led by Yanagi Soetsu's follower Yoshida Shoya.

Otsuka San is a 4th generation bladesmith. The waiting list for his knives is 1-2 years long, only accepting orders from a limited customer base of clientele he respects and knows will understand his work, including us! The knives by Otsuka Hamono will handle most everyday uses, with the long edge retention of Aogami #1 blade steel, yet still maintaining exceptional hardness thanks to the skilled hand-forging and heat treatments by Otsuka San.

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